

Fact Sheet: Extreme Heat

Doing too much on a hot day, spending too much time in the sun or staying too long in an overheated place can cause heat-related illnesses. Know the symptoms of heat disorders and overexposure to the sun, and be ready to give first aid treatment.

Before

- Contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter for information on extreme heat.
- Install window air conditioners snugly.
- Close any floor heat registers nearby.
- Insulate spaces around air conditioners for a tighter fit.
- Use a circulating or box fan to spread the cool air.

Keep heat outside and cool air inside.

- Install temporary reflectors, such as aluminum foil covered cardboard, to reflect any heat back outside. Keep the cool air inside by weather-stripping doors and windowsills.
- Consider keeping storm windows up all year. Storm windows can keep the heat out of a house in the summer the same way they keep the cold out in the winter.
- Check air-conditioning ducts for proper insulation.

During

- Protect windows. Hang shades, draperies, awnings, or louvers on windows that receive morning or afternoon sun. Outdoor awnings or louvers can reduce the heat entering the house by as much as 80 percent. Conserve electricity.
- During periods of extreme heat, people tend to use a lot more power for air conditioning which can lead to a power shortage or outage. Stay indoors as much as possible. If air conditioning is not available, stay on the lowest floor out of the sunshine. Remember that electric fans do not cool, they just blow hot air around.
- Eat well-balanced, light meals.
- Drink plenty of water regularly. Persons who have epilepsy or heart, kidney, or liver disease; are on fluid-restrictive diets; or have a problem with fluid retention should consult a doctor before increasing liquid intake.
- Limit intake of alcoholic beverages. Although beer and alcoholic beverages appear to satisfy thirst, they actually cause further body dehydration.
- Dress in loose-fitting clothes that cover as much skin as possible. Lightweight, light-colored clothing that reflects heat and sunlight and helps maintain normal body temperature.
- Protect face and head by wearing a wide-brimmed hat.
- Allow your body to get acclimated to hot temperatures for the first 2 or 3 days of a heat wave.

- Avoid too much sunshine. Sunburn slows the skin's ability to cool itself. Use a sunscreen lotion with a high SPF (sun protection factor) rating.
- Avoid extreme temperature changes. A cool shower immediately after coming in from hot temperatures can result in hypothermia, particularly for elderly and very young people.
- Slow down. Reduce, eliminate, or reschedule strenuous activities. High-risk individuals should stay in cool places. Get plenty of rest to allow your natural "cooling system" to work.
- Take salt tablets only if specified by your physician. Persons on salt-restrictive diets should check with a physician before increasing salt intake.
- Vacuum air conditioner filters weekly during periods of high use.
- Learn the symptoms of heat disorders, such as sunburn, heat exhaustion and heat stroke and know how to give first aid.

During a Drought

- Lower water use. Watering the lawn and washing the car waste water. Whenever possible, re-use water.
- Place a brick or other large, solid object in the flush tank of the toilet to reduce the water used to flush.